Another Instalment of Mr. Robins's Fascinating Russian Story

Continued from page one

mujik loves the Little Father. He pines for the Little Father. In a few hours this Lenine and this Trotzky will be gone. Forget them."

Just as under Kerensky, the indoor mind was again at work. Its working was miraculous. The Russian mujik, having got a slice of fresh land for himself out of the revolution, was pining to give it back. He wanted his landlord again. He wanted his rent tax again. He wanted the knout on his back again.

Robins did not believe in such peasants and no such peasants appeared. There were serious disturbances later, for other reasons. But the uprisings and upcomings of Czar-loving peasants from the Don and from the Urals and from the Ukraine and from the Finnish marshes were phantoms. Trotzky and Lenine stood. They stood for a week, and for a month, and for a year, and then for some more. But the diplomats were most of them equally stubborn. Never in all that time did they fail to see Trotzky and Lenine falling to-morrow.

Boche Grabbing

The Allied and American governments, rather than admit the existence of Trotzky, let the Germans do all the grabbing of Russian raw materials on the Russian frontier.

Nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary for the Allied and American governments to talk to Trotzky on some subjects, at some times, somehow. They had embassies in Petrograd; and these embassies had to get police protection, for instance, and telegraph service, and similar courtesies and facilities. In order to get them, they absolutely had to talk to some Bolsheviki. They would not talk to them "officially." But they talked to them "unofficially."

For the American embassy Robins was the "unofficial" talker. He was not a "diplomat." He was not a member of the club, so to speak; and, accordingly, he could go to Smolny on behalf of the American Ambassador without in the slightest degree compromising the American Ambassador. He went, and he kept on going, month after month, at the American Ambassador's request. He was "unofficial," but he was recognized.

In all that follows in all of these articles it should therefore be thoroughly understood that Robins was not going to Smolny in any merely private capacity.

To begin with, he was now head of the American Red Cross Mission. Colonel Thompson had gone back to America in the hope of being able to bring the facts of the Russian situation to American official attention. Colonel Robins had taken his place.

Secondly, and especially, Robins was the American ambassador's "unofficial" aide in all dealings with Smolny. Once an order came from Washington forbidding Robins to go to Smolny any more. The ambassador secured its cancellation. He wanted Robins to go. Months later, when Robins was at Moscow, and when the ambassador was at Vologda, Robins received a certain telegram from the ambassador. It showed Robins's status clearly, and it to-day evidences the nature of the opportunities through which Robins secured his knowledge of Smolny affairs. It said:

"Do not feel I should be justified in asking you to remain longer in Moscow to neglect of the prosecution of your Red Cross work; but this does not imply any lack of appreciation of the service you have rendered me in keeping me advised concerning matters important for me to know and giving suggestions and advice as well as being a channel of unofficial communication with the Soviet Government."

"Unofficially" Robins got protection for the embassy against the anarchists.

In America we think of anarchists as furtive individual criminals. In Petrograd they were a regular organized political party. They had headquarters and local branch offices and newspapers. Their leading specialty was denouncing the Bolsheviki for being too mild, too tame. The Bolsheviki were letting the capitalists live. They were letting the bourgeois survive. The bourgeois should be instantly expropriated, instantly exterminated. The Bolsheviki were not doing it. Lenine and Trotzky were traitors to the proletariate. They were lacking in "true proletarian ruthlessness."

Besides this leading specialty, the anarchists had a minor one. It was to denounce the United States. The anarchists were the earnest anti-American party. They wanted Mooney out of jail in San Francisco—their comrade Mooney. If the Americans did not let Mooney out, so much the worse for the Americans. "Violence will answer violence."

In pursuit of this aim the anarchists used to threaten the American Embassy. One morning, at about 11 o'clock, the ambassador spoke to Robins anxiously. A woman had called on the 'phone. She would not give her name; but she had an important message, and she would deliver that message personally, if the ambassador would send somebody to meet her. The ambassador sent Mr. Huntington and Mr. Johnson, and the woman told her story.

She had given a party to some friends, at her house. There was a knock at the door. A sailor stood outside, with wine, in bottles, in a sack. He wanted to sell it. It was good wine, he said. He had got it, he said, from the cellar of the Italian embassy. And he went on to say: "I'll soon have some more. We're going to blow up the American embassy to-night."

"So," said the ambassador, "that's where we are! These anarchists are getting too strong. They're coming to be the power. Smolny can't control them."

Robins went to the embassy that night and stayed there till on into the morning. There was no blowing up. There never was.

Robins went to the secretary of Council of People's Commissioners—a gentleman named Bonch Bruevich—and told him that "this anarchist business is going too far." Did the Council of People's Commissioners want to drive the American embassy out of Russia? Or did it want the American embassy to stay? If it wanted it to stay, it ought to do something.

That night the Council of People's Commissioners sent its soldiers to the headquarters of the anarchists. The anarchists had machine guns. There was a battle. The chief of the anarchists was shot. Much material—sugar, shoes, tea and so on—was captured. The next day the anarchist newspaper, "Bure-Vestnik," said bitterly:

"The thieves and murderers from Smolny have broken into our headquarters and have shot our beloved leader and have stolen our supplies. Fellow workmen, we live under a hell of a proletarian government."

At Moscow, also, the anarchists were a regular organized political party. When the Soviet government moved to Moscow and when Robins moved there after it, there was anarchist trouble again, which again showed the method and the formula of German intrigue in Russia.

Robins got into his motor car one day to go down to the telegraph station. The ambassador was at Vologda. Every day, at a certain hour, the Bolshevik government placed at the disposal of Robins and the ambassador a telegraph wire between Moscow and Vologda for confidential secret official (or "unofficial") messages. Robins got to the telegraph station, and sent off some messages, and received some, and came outdoors again to his car. As he came out, some ten armed men were surrounding his car and saying "Requisitioned."

"Requisitioned by whom?" said Robins. It did not seem to be clear by whom. But the fact of requisition was perfectly clear. When Robins got into the car four of the ten armed men got in after him and rested their bayonets on the sills of the car's open windows. Robins's interpreter—Alexander Gumberg—got on the running board; and a few of the requisitioners accompanied him there. The others climbed up beside the driver. The order to start was given. The driver, very properly obeyed. An address was shouted. It was the address of the oldest and largest anarchist club in Moscow—9 Povarskaya.

Who's Afraid?

Gumberg, with a revolver held against his body, was still defiant. "You aren't afraid, are you?" he said to the man who held the revolver, as a truckload of Soviet soldiers approached. Gumberg thought he saw a rescue. But if anybody was afraid at that moment, it was the truckload of Soviet soldiers. They looked at the requisitioning anarchists, and felt it was none of their business, and went on.

Robins saw it was time to get out. Through Gumberg he told the driver to slow the car. The driver, very creditably, taking a long chance, slowed it almost to a standstill. Robins pushed his way from his seat to the running board. His captors gesticulated and vociferated, but did not stop him. He and Gumberg alighted. They turned and stood. A man on the running board was holding a rifle which was levelled directly at Robins's body, and his finger was on the trigger. But he did not shoot. He was lacking in "true proletarian ruthlessness." He only said something. What he said was, "Sprechen sie deutsch?" "I speak only English," said Robins, and his car jumped forward and proceeded in the direction of 9 Povarskaya.

Robins himself proceeded, not without heat, to the rooms of the committee for the suppression of counter revolution and sabotage. There he saw a member of the committee—Derjinski. To Derjinski he expressed his indignation. Derjinski was sympathetic and confident. "I'll get the car back for you in two hours," said Derjinski. But the car was not back in two hours and it was not back the next day.

Robins went to see Trotzky. Could he get that car? Trotzky was sure of it. He called Derjinski on the 'phone and talked to him quite a while. Then he seemed not so sure. In fact, he seemed quite uncertain.

The next day Trotzky called Robins on the 'phone and asked him to come to see him. Robins went and Trotzky said:

"Colonel Robins, I'm going to tell you all about it, and when I've told you, you'll understand Russian politics better and you'll also see that Russian politics, in some ways, is very much like politics anywhere else.

"These anarchists of ours in Russia took part in the revolution against the Czar. They helped the revolution. Therefore, they had a certain standing when the revolution was successful. Kerensky never dared to attack the club at 9 Povarskaya. The anarchists continued under Kerensky. They continue now. You inform me that they have thirteen centres in Moscow. You are mistaken. They have twenty-six.

"Now, I do not need to tell you that the Germans are working among them. You discovered that fact for yourself in Petrograd. The Germans are working among them here. And every day we are attacked in the anarchist press and at anarchist meetings. Why, then, do we not raid them? Well, we will. We will in a few days. You will see."

"But why not now?" said Robins.

"I'm going to tell you," said Trotzky. "You have elections, I believe, in America. Well, we're having elections in Russia—in Moscow—now. We are the party in power. We are being charged by many of our opponents with ruling by the bayonet. Well, we are cautious. We are not going to use bayonets during the period of these elections, for any purpose. We are not going to have any raids or riots whatsoever. We are going to have perfect peace. So, Colonel Robins, you see! I'm sorry; but you'll have to do without your car till these elections are over."

Next Day

They happened to be over soon. They were over the very next day. On the night of that day—or, rather, in the early morning of the day ensuing—at 2 a. m.—the Bolshevists attacked all twenty-six centres of the anarchists in Moscow. They attacked with infantry, cavalry, machine guns, cannon and tanks. They settled the question whether the Bolshevists or the anarchists were on top in Russia. They killed fourteen anarchists, wounded forty-two, captured 600 and dispersed the rest. They confiscated their stores. Among those stores was one exceedingly interesting entry. The Bolshevists laid their hands on it and increased thereby both their military equipment and their diplomatic information. It consisted of a set of machine guns of the newest German pattern—a pattern so new, in fact, that these were the first specimens seen in Russia.

But the German support of the anarchists was only, after all, to be expected. It was in precise accordance with their favorite formula of intrigue in Russia.

Trotzky was keen-sighted—and blind. He was blind to the greatest necessity going. He was blind to the necessity of Allied military pressure on the Kaiser's armies. His hatred of "capitalism" blinded him. If these "capitalistic" Allies were physically victorious, said Trotzky, they would make a "capitalistic" and anti-democratic Allied peace, just as a victorious Kaiser would make a "capitalistic" and anti-democratic German peace. Trotzky's propagandist campaign against Germany sprang from no impulse to help the Allies. It sprang simply from an intense impulse to help socialism.

Robins's view was: "Here is a man who is shooting with a powerful engine of propaganda at all 'capitalism.' But the first 'capitalism' he can hit, and the only one he can immediately and effectively hit, is the one right next door to him on the map—Germany. For heaven's sake encourage him to shoot."

At First

This policy, for a moment, we thought good. The government at Washington, of its own motion, thought it good. A considerable sum of American money, out of the Treasury of the United States, came to Russia from Washington and was spent, to Robins's knowledge, in putting Bolshevik propaganda into Germany. It was spent by the American committee on public information. Part of it went through the Russian revolutionary Bolshevik propaganda bureau. The Germans could accuse us of having used certain Bolsheviks as our "agents." But they were not our "agents." They were serving their own purposes. Robins often saw how completely independent they could be.

Everything Trotzky did at Brest-Litovsk, everything he did as commissioner of foreign affairs from the time he took the office to the time he left it, had really just one essential aim: to make a Socialist revolution in Germany, in order to save the Russian Socialist revolution by getting Russia's most dangerous neighbor and Europe's most developed centre swung over from "capitalism" to the "coöperative commonwealth."

Robins saw Trotzky often during the period of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. It was Trotzky's climax. It was the beginning of his partial decline. He was in his most temperamental temper.

One midnight, at a meeting of the executive committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, he appeared in the doorway pale and exhausted and despairing. "The armistice is gone," he said, "General Hoffmann refuses to agree not to shift troops from the Eastern front to the Western. We do not care for the Allied governments. We are under no obligations to the Allied governments. But it would not be a democratic peace if we allowed that shifting. We will not allow it. Never will we allow it. I have declared to General Hoffmann that we withdraw from the negotiations."

Almost in collapse he disappeared. At 4 o'clock he returned. He was fresh, in good color, exuberant. "General Hoffmann has yielded," he cried. "He has agreed to our terms against the shifting of troops. We told him that otherwise we would address ourselves to the workingmen of Germany."

This temperamentalism in speech led to temperamentalism in action. Trotzky sometimes missed the facts of a situation in his passion for its

Robins, standing in front of the car that carried the American flag every day through revolutionary Petrograd and Moscow. Next to him, with the rosette on his coat, stands Jacob Peters, who has a bloody notoriety throughout the world as a second Robespierre. It was he who signed the death papers of the Bolshevik government. At the extreme right is Charles S. Smith, The Associated Press correspondent in Petrograd

Alexander Gumberg, Russian private secretary and interpreter for Robins

Raymond Robins

tioned in his article published in New York before he returned to Russia. Many people said that at Brest-Litovsk he was talking to the world. The speeches Robins heard him make in the Soviet at Petrograd prove that he was not talking to the world at all. The world was, indeed, a gallery; and Trotzky never objects to a gallery. But the audience—the audience in the body of the house—the audience for whom the words were chosen—was the workingmen of Germany. To them those words were conveyed by channels innumerable. And to them Trotzky said, in sum:

"You are most of you Socialists. Your government is trying to impose imperialistic terms on the first Socialist government in the world. But we, the members of that first Socialist government, can not and will not connive at imperialism. We are holding out against those terms. We are rejecting them. Are you going to march for them? Or are you going to rise and break your masters who make you march?"

It was penetrating, and it penetrated—in time. It was the most poisonous dose in all the propaganda that General Hoffmann finally saw driving his soldiers to sedition and revolution. The Bolshevik propaganda worked — ultimately. But there was an immediate question. Immediately, on the morrow of Brest-Litovsk, would the German soldiers march?

"No," said Trotzky. Like all artists, he believed in the irresistible appealingness of his work. He had shown the German workingmen the folly and wickedness of marching, and they would not march.

"But they will," said Lenine.

There was a certain private meeting of certain members of the All-Russian and Petrograd Soviets. It was a time of supreme tension, of the stretching and snapping of many judgments and of many reputations. The German government had made its open and full announcement of its imperialistic and annexationistic policies toward Russia. In the Soviet there was consternation, indignation, fury. But would the Russian army in the field fight?

"It will," said loud voices.

"But it will not," said Lenine. "It did not fight at Tarnopol. Kerensky was in power. He used all his power and all his eloquence to make it fight. With the Allies he ordered the great advance. But the Russian army did not fight. It ran, and had to run. It is not an army any more. It is only peasants wanting bread and land. It is going home. The Russian army will never fight again until it is reorganized into a new revolutionary army. The present army will not fight."

Lenine spoke very calmly. He had written out his ideas into "twenty-one theses," as if he were giving a course of lectures in a college. Those "twenty-one theses" were his reasons for believing that Russia would have to sign the peace. They were crushing. But Lenine did not try to crush with them at that meeting.

He spoke for only about twenty minutes, and he spoke very much without emphasis. He merely stated his position. The Germans would advance; the Russian army would not fight; and the Russian Socialist Republic, in order not to be trampled militarily out of existence, would have to sign the peace.

Striding On

Then Trotzky swayed the meeting. The revolution was afoot in Germany. Trotzky saw it striding on. Comrade Lenine was mistaken. The German comrades were not so base as to fight for the terms of Brest-Litovsk. Besides, there was Poland and there was Lithuania and there was Letvia. They must not be surrendered to the Germans. The Polish comrades and the Lithuanian comrades and the Lettish comrades must not be deserted. "We must hold them for the revolution," said Trotzky.

"We must not be intoxicated by the revolutionary phrase," said Lenine.

But Trotzky swayed the meeting. And Lenine let him. Robins afterward asked Lenine why. Lenine said:

"I am willing to let Trotzky see if he can put off the peace. I am willing to let him see if he can save us from it. I would rejoice if he could. But I wanted the comrades to know what I was thinking. I wanted them to know it, so that they can remember it a few days from now. I have to keep their confidence."

During those few days, till they ended, Lenine was very unpopular. Yet everything was as Lenine said it would be. But, as he said each new thing, he said it to a storm of protest.

"We will call the fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets," he said. "What?" was the answer. "Call the congress now? It can't be done. Russia can't send delegates now. It can't bring its mind to think of sending them. And the delegates can't come, they won't travel, at this time. Impossible!"

"We will call it at Moscow," said Lenine. "What?" came the answer. "Moscow? The stronghold of the reaction? Go to Moscow and the Hall of the Nobles and the haunts of the old régime? Leave Petrograd, the revolutionary city? Never!"

But it happened. The fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets was called as Lenine had said. The Germans had advanced, as Lenine had said. The Congress met at Moscow in the Hall of the Nobles, as Lenine had said. It ratified the peace, as Lenine had said.

The shadow of Lenine grew upon Trotzky. It grew upon Radek. It grew upon Karolin. It grew upon everybody. More than ever they were eclipsed. More than ever Lenine was master. He had out-analyzed and outseen everybody. His books and his documents and his reports and his theses and all his scholastic methods and manners had not hindered him — perhaps they had helped him—becoming his party's absolute realist and almost absolute ruler.

The Russian army was helpless and hopeless, yes. But could some support be got from the Allies? Would the Allies promise to intervene with help, with some sort of help, if at Moscow the Russian Soviets, instead of ratifying the peace, should repudiate it?

A memorandum was written. In it an inquiry was addressed to the Allies. Their answer belongs to the third chapter of our diplomacy in revolutionary Russia. In this second chapter there was simply the memorandum itself. It asked the Allies what they would do in certain circumstances.

So Did Trotzky

But Lenine already suspected what they would do. So did Trotzky.

Trotzky had said to Robins one day:

"Haven't you Americans got a Russian railway mission of Americans somewhere?"

"Certainly."

"Where is it?"

"Nagasaki."

"Gone to Japan?"

"Yes."

"What's it doing there?"

"Eating its head off."

"Why don't you send it here?"

"Why, Mr. Commissioner, you know there are many Americans"——

"Yes, they think I'm a German agent. Well, now, suppose I am. Just assume, for argument, that I am. You admit I have never told you I would do a thing and then failed to do it. My motives may be bad, but my actions go with my promises. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, out of some motive, which you may assume to be bad, I am willing to share the railway system of Russia half and half with the United States; and if you will bring your railway mission into Russia I promise you that I will give its members complete authority over half the transportation of all the Russia of the Soviets. You see?"

"Clearly. You want us Americans to reform and restore your railway system for you, so that it can carry food successfully and so that you can feed your people and keep your government going."

"Yes. But I propose to pay you in precisely the coin you most need and want. Colonel Robins, have you ever seen a gun map of our front?"

Munitions

Trotzky unrolled it before him. It showed some six hundred miles of locations of cannon and of shells—nests of cannon, dumps of shells, usable stuff, quantities of it, the material leavings of a once mighty army. It showed cannon that had never been fired—cannon new and of the latest type, with their shells beside them.

"It's of no more use to us. Our army does not fight in any more foreign wars just now. Lenine says the Germans will advance. If they do, they will take all that stuff. We cannot move it back. We can do small things on our railways now, but not big things. Most of our technical railway managers are against us. They are against the revolution. They are sabotaging the revolution. Our railways are headless. The whole point is: Our railways need new heads. Will you supply them?"

"I'll inquire."

"But be sure you make this clear: My motive, whether good or bad, is entirely selfish. I get a reorganized and effective railway system for Soviet Russia. And your motive, so far as I am concerned, is entirely selfish, too. You save a mass of munitions from all possibility of falling into the hands of the Germans. You get a benefit. I get a benefit. Mutual services, mutual benefits and no pretences! What do you say?"

"I'll find out."

So again Robins ran to diplomatic circles with what he thought was good news, and again it was received without interest. Again he heard the wisdom of the palaces. The peasants were really rising now. Lenine and Trotzky were really falling now. The real Russia, the Russia loving the whip, the Russia loving the strong man—Kaledine, Alexiev, somebody—was asserting itself. Up from the Don. Up from the Urals. No use bothering with Lenine and Trotzky. No use at all.

So those guns and those shells remained where they were, and so the Germans took them and made use of them on the bodies of Frenchmen and Englishmen and Americans in the March drive and in the June drive of 1918 on the western front; and Lenine and Trotzky were still standing.

Another Instalment July 20